

window™

view of the Armenian Church



Testing
the
Myth
and
Beyond

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Dear Reader:

We began publishing *Window* a few years ago with a simple commitment: To provide a fresh view of the Armenian Church. Our readers have been appreciative of this unclouded view which allows the Church to be seen as the center for our Christian faith.

In the two years since, *Window* became the first forum where the religious needs of Armenia and Kharabagh were discussed; The work of Teotig was translated and analyzed; Impact of the cults on the Armenian community was recorded; The first ever International Clergy Conference was covered; New trends in the Church were discussed. As always, along with analysis and critique, we have provided suggestions and comments for a more vibrant and dynamic Church.

Since the beginning of this year we have been faced with some important decisions about the role of this publication in the Armenian Church. While the production of *Window* has been delayed, we assure our readers that this is only a temporary phase of adjustment. Simultaneously with this issue, we are working on two others—one of which will be in Armenian for distribution in Armenia. Editor Hratch Tchilingirian recently returned from Armenia and will provide interviews and commentary in the next issue.

We have now restructured and are ready for full operations. At ACRA, we are committed to *Window* and its continued publication. We are thankful for your support during these early critical years of operation. As always, we welcome your comments and suggestions for this forum.

—Armenian Church Research and Analysis Group

WINDOW

view of the Armenian Church

Volume II, Number 4 — 1992

What is Myth? by Paige Lindsey Shaw 3

Testing the Myth and Beyond

by Vazken Movsesian & Hratch Tchilingirian 6

A Sacrifice of Praise: Blessing of Madagh

by Michael Findikyan 9

The Bishop in Cassock & Reebocks 13

Chrismation in the Oriental Orthodox Church

by Garabed D. Kochakian 14

"A Call to Excellence" 19

Compendium 21 **Letters** 22

Cover: Original Oil Painting "Failed Papacy"
by Ared Arzumian, Toronto, Canada



Publisher

THE ARMENIAN CHURCH
RESEARCH & ANALYSIS GROUP

Editors

FR VAZKEN MOVSESIAN
DN HRATCH TCHILINGIRIAN

Art Director

YN SUSAN MOVSESIAN

Distributions

ALICE ATAMIAN

Liaison

DN MICHAEL FINDIKYAN
ABRAHAM SLDRIAN

Photography

BRUCE BURR

Tele comm

ROUPEN NAHABEDIAN

Administrative Assist.

JEANNIE MURACHANIAN

Layout & Logistics

SRP

The views expressed in *Window* are not necessarily those of the Armenian Church hierarchy. *Window* is known as *Loosamood* in Armenia. *Window* is an independent publication supported solely by reader subscriptions. Entire contents ©1992 ACRA. All rights reserved. Use of original articles, translations, art work or photographs without the expressed permission of the publisher is strictly prohibited by law. Subscription information: Send name, address and \$22.00 (payable to SRP) for each subscription to: ACRA Group, P.O. Box 700664, San Jose, CA 95170. An electronic Version of *Window* is available on the St. Andrew Information Network (SAIN) System: 1-408-257-1846, 2400 baud, 8-N-1. Address all correspondence to: The ACRA. *Window* is produced on a Macintosh/Apple II system and Laserjet on a LaserWriter II. Some of the material used is compiled and prepared utilizing the SAIN electronic forum. Printed in the United States of America by Group Publishing. *Window* and the logo appearing on the cover are trademarks of ACRA. Macintosh, Apple II and LaserWriter are registered trademarks of Apple Computer.

© 1992 A.C.R.A. Group
P.O. Box 700664, San Jose, CA
95170

DEFINITIONS

WHAT IS MYTH?



Paige Lindsey Shaw

SPECIAL FOR WINDOW

Why is everybody suddenly talking about "myth?" What is a myth? Am I supposed to understand by a myth that a story is a true story, or a made-up story? Does "it's only a myth" mean something is a fairy-tale? Does an "event of mythic proportions" mean something never really happened? Aren't myths just stories from folk religions? Nothing in the Bible is a myth, is it! Is it?

A myth is about something that is true. It is a story—or a tale embedded in a cultural tradition—about a universal, recognizable truth. The story as it unfolds may not be factually true, but that is not the point; it may be set in a no-time, a "dream-time" (as Australian Aborigines call it), or the "creative-era" (as Mircea Eliade calls it) of the world. There is nothing in a myth that we can "prove" objectively, nor do we want to—but we find ourselves moved, gripped, enlightened by the story. Subjectively, we, as individuals, and we in society, or as a people, find ourselves transformed with a new

Paige Lindsey Shaw received her M. Div. from Yale University in 1976, and has taught classes in Christian origins, New Testament, and the history of the Early Church. She is the wife of Dr. Lewis Shaw, an orthodox theologian and a friend of the Armenian Church.

understanding. We may learn what is expected of us in a new stage of life, how to express our identity, how to understand and face the inevitabilities and mysteries of life.

Myths are so important to every culture in every stage of its development, that we have continued, in every age, to try to explain them—and we interpret them or propose a formal key to them by the lights of what is most important to us in that age.

If you were to take a course or to read a set text on myth or on mythology (a word that can mean either the study of myth itself, or a collection of the mythic tales of a people), you would learn, first of all, that six major and exclusive theories have governed the study of myth in modern times.

Speculation on the earliest origins of religion—a pursuit that can really only be guesswork—led nineteenth century scholars to declare that *all* mythology was *allegory*; myths were about the personification (called "anthropomorphism") of weather, seasons, or astronomical phenomena. A story about a young hero who fights and kills a monster, for instance, is really about daylight conquering darkness, or spring overpowering the winter. Of course, there are nature myths, but they hardly make up the majority of "tra-

ditional tales" (G.S. Kirk's term) in any culture. Yet, it is true that in all mythologies the whole natural world appears to be infused with countless anthropomorphic powers.

By the end of the nineteenth century educated people had come to believe in the triumph of science—all things could and would be explained scientifically. Therefore, it made sense that myths were simply primitive (or proto-) science. They were *etiological*—they gave people a cause-and-effect explanation of something in the real world, usually something profound or disturbing, as well as important physical aspects of the world. Why is there death, or evil? Or, where did we as a people come from? Why is there sea, and then land? Why animals and also humans? Well, clearly, today we have "science"—and we *still* need myth. We also now recognize that "primitive man" is neither as credulous or as ignorant of the actual processes of nature, as scholars previously supposed. Yet, if one explores a myth using this key one can often discover a deep and subtle philosophical interpretation of human problem. "Why does — ?" can reveal a surprisingly sophisticated solution that still obtains.

Modern anthropologists, however, insisted that the study of myth

belonged only to the actual study of primitive cultures and of the function of society. Mythology was *not* infantile science but instead a society's way to establish and legitimize its social institutions and conventions. This is called the *charter theory*. It depends on several academic disciplines, including psychology and comparative religion. Yes, in many important ways, a society's mythology tells much about how it works. Also, this concept is crucial to an informed understanding of primitive cultures, how they explain their customs, and the logic informing their underlying societal structures.

At the same time, though, many scholars of the *nature* of religion maintain that myths serve the very special purpose of bringing us, the hearer or participant in a rite, into an intentional relationship with, or an experience of, the *creative era*, the moment when all that is was made, and when the Makers and Powers themselves were reachable. This is why some myths go with certain "rites of passages;" their telling puts the initiate in contact with the generative and transforming power of creation, and the essentially sacred.

An earlier concept that was important, and is so even today, is the *Myth and Ritual School* that was made popular by the publication of J.G. Frazer's lengthy *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915). Myths, these scholars said, are vestiges of important rituals—most of them forgotten or radically changed. Any story that cannot be related to an actual cultic act or ritual cannot, therefore, be classed as a proper myth. Clearly, we can connect many myths to cults and rites. But *did* the action and rite come first, and then give us the tale? Some questions about the origin of religion can never be answered; furthermore, this view leaves us with a massive body of clear-cut mythologies that cannot fit the mold.

Last, we have the school of thought popularized today which is derived from the studies of the *human psyche* made by Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung. The late twentieth century is assuredly the age of the individual.

Our age is manifestly concerned with how one becomes an individual, and the well-being and wholeness of that individual. And we expect psychology to explain and to determine that well-being. At the same time, it is a tenet of modern belief that traditional society is falling apart, so we experience concern for the structures and beliefs that used to hold that society together. In addition we recognize an organic integrity between an individual and his or her society. A current school of understanding the meaning of myth, therefore, rests on the work of Freud, Jung, Ernest Cassirer, and its popularizer, the late Joseph Campbell.

Myths, this explanation goes, can be determined to have their ultimate reality in the human psyche. As each person tries to understand and internalize his or her own individual experience,

True myths will always work on several different levels and respond to several kinds of examination

These myths, depending usually on symbols (which are revealed in dreams and in all mythologies), express crucial ideas and emotions repressed deep within his or her self. We often come across significant "archetypes" like the all-important "earth mother" or mother-goddess, or perhaps the developmental process reflected in the common "quest" story. This interpretation describes how society and each person *needs* ritual, mystery, transcendence, awe, and myth in order to fulfill the whole self, and to achieve well-being and inner integrity. All cultures up until our day understood these things, and we must recover them.

While myths may be *like* dreams and may have developed to meet the unconscious needs of those who told

them—much as Freud's "dream work" of the individual does—myth's role as an inchoate clue to some vaguely-defined "dream-thinking" of a people depends on erroneous assumptions about the evolution of any given human culture. Myths do indeed plainly deal with common and basic human ideas, but they are only one expression of the unconscious human mind or any given human culture. Furthermore, some cultures do *not* seem to use the conventional "archetypes." Also, we are left with questions of definition such as, what does "symbol" or "archetype" actually mean? Anyone who is well-read finds himself uncomfortable with Campbell's attempts to stretch out obscure legends and etiologies to put them on a par with obviously highly significant, central, and complex cosmic stories.

Still, the contributions of Freud, Jung and Cassirer, that myth is one of the primary facets of cultural expression, has illuminated the entire study of mythology. G.S. Kirk, in *The Nature of Greek Myths*, maintains that myths *are* a unique form of expression; they make us respond imaginatively and emotionally. They are most clearly "psychologically satisfying" on their own, and in some way they evoke in us a particular feeling, "a visceral thing, like a response to great music or poetry."

What then is it about a particular story that creates this response? What is it that is the mythic quality? Some say that the story must be about sacred events or about deities, but this would exclude many powerful stories—stories that contain important messages about life, in general, and our place in the world, in particular.

Every absolute and exclusive theory ends up dismissing or marginalizing some stories, and sometimes even an entire culture's body of traditional tales. Certainly we have to apply, in order to understand the full import of any given story, several methods of analysis—and even then some tales will defy analysis. If you should successfully explain a myth to your satisfaction,

you want to still keep exploring and examining that story. Myths are subtle, and may surprise you if you keep applying different keys. Myths are changeable things—a traditional tale may have evolved, have re-located in time and place, and have developed new ambiguities. True myths will always work on several different levels and respond to several kinds of examination and there is *not* always a “right” key to every story.

Some scholars are careful to separate proper myths from other kinds of traditional stories. The *legends*, for example, could be described as tales about plausibly historical figures like Hercules, or Odysseus, or George Washington. Yet books of Greek mythology contain tales about the Trojan War and about Hercules. Then there is the *animal fable* like Aesop’s Fables or the Uncle Remus tales; some of these overlap into the traditional moral or cautionary tale. Finally there is the great body of stories called *folk-tales* like those of the Brothers Grimm. Nevertheless these folk-tales, as we call them, contain mythic elements, and a good many myths have folk-tale motifs. Several child psychologists point out that “fairy tales” have important things to tell children about developmental tasks ahead of them; children, it seems, are reassured by the solving of problems in these stories. They identify with the characters and their actions, and they sense that small and powerless though they are, their day will come at last. An examination of some folk-tales such as “Beauty and the Beast” in light of its relation to the tale of “Eros and Psyche” lifts it out of the mainstream of ordinary fairy tales. Clearly, few hard and fast rules can be absolutely applied to all bodies of traditional tales.

Sometimes the attempt to find the right “key” to myths to explain all its elements separately, can rob a story of its power—and its point. Perhaps, trying to analyze a myth is like explaining a joke: the power to amuse or awe us is gone. For example, take the story told in Exodus of the parting of the Red Sea that allowed the Israelites to pass through safely. By trying to “prove” the story

(according to western notions of factuality) and showing that the Red Sea dried up as the consequence of an earthquake or volcanic eruption — one has reduced a major event in the sacred history of Israel and its relationship with God to a mere accident of the weather (and hence, one assumes, a rather gratuitous misunderstanding on the part of the Hebrews!). The *truth* in the story, the point of telling it, is that in real human history God acted to save His people; He is a God Who acts, and Who works out His purpose in our world because we matter so much to Him. God acts in this world and

Clearly, today
we have
“science” —
and we still
need myths

makes our human history a transcendent thing.

On the other hand, we can point to more recently recorded, historical events—the sort in history books—and speak of them as having gained “mythic proportions” because of royalty, no ancient history, and no indigenous connection to the land, have *events* which when described move us all profoundly. The bleeding feet of Washington’s soldiers at Valley Forge, the Constitution—these images and documents recounting our nation’s founding have the power to evoke strong, universal feelings in all Americans. They describe something essential about our common identity and beliefs. They are not simple nor easily “unpacked” either. Here our history is lifted up and we see a sort of transformation begin as we sanctify our past. One would, today, point to the images repeatedly shown of the Berlin Wall tumbling down, of the tanks rumbling away from Red Square—as long as the twentieth century is remembered these images will remain.

Myths grip us when tricky moral problems are described—things we

do not understand, where justice does not seem to apply, where an inevitable end is foredoomed. Human death, for instance, in almost every culture, seems to be explained as the tragic consequence of some apparently trivial kind of accident or wrong choice. We can point to the fixed dichotomy between the goddesses Artemis and Aphrodite. Why is this? Then there is the tragic tale of Oedipus—which is not about incest, but about the terrible fact that ignorance is not innocence, that our most unknowing act may be our most guilty, and that countless people suffer from one man’s deed.

Why *are* such images, tales, recountings, and retellings repeated over and over, from generation to generation and culture to culture? One answer lies in just that emotional and ineffable power that draws one across language and culture. This writer remembers, as a child, being utterly and repeatedly entranced by two compelling stories — the story of “The Death of Baldur” from Norse mythology, and the story in Iroquois mythology of the self-sacrificing death of Mondamin at the hands of Hiawatha (the Algonquin Manabozho) and how the maize grew from his body in the earth. Such stories, poetic and mystical, make us all human together, in the same way, and make our common human heart a transforming, transcendent thing. Something to tell stories about.

SUGGESTED READING

- Joseph Campbell, *Hero With a Thousand Faces*. New York, 1949.
Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*. New York, 1988.
H.R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*. Harmondsworth, 1958.
Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*. New York, 1961.
Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. London, 1958.
T.S. Eliot, “The Wasteland.” London, 1922.
Sir James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*. New York (one-volume edition), 1922.
G.S. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths*. Harmondsworth, 1974.
S.N. Kramer (ed.), *Mythologies of the Ancient World*. Garden City, New York, 1961.
Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science, and Religion*. New York, 1948.
Martin P. Nilsson, *Greek Piety*. New York, 1948 (1969).
J.B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Third Edition). Princeton, 1969.

Testing the Myth *and* Beyond

Fr Vazken Movsesian
Dn Hratch Tchilingirian



The understanding of myths and their place in religious perception is vital to the understanding of Christianity, as it is the case with most religions. Myths help define and shape beliefs and practices of a group of people, for instance, the Armenian people. It is important to emphasize, however, that by labeling a story as "myth," it does not mean that the story is false or is a product of imagination. Myths may or may not be factual, but they ostensibly point to certain truths.

The present discussion will focus on "myths" created by Armenians and used in various forms to perpetuate an Armenian religious dynamic, which sometimes is removed from the basic tenets of Christianity.

The truth of a message is not necessarily in the factual details of the story, or the saying, or the parable. But rather in its substance. For example, the Fundamentalists claim to read the Bible literally, while for the Orthodox, the truth of the Bible is not limited by the absolute details of the stories and events. In the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11), the *literal reality* of whether the son had to tend to swine or any

other livestock is inconsequential. The didactic intent of the story is found in the father's unconditional love and acceptance of his son. As such, myths may not always be factual, but they always certainly point to an accepted truth.

The Armenians also perpetuate many myths. These myths invite and challenge the person to see the truth rather than search for literal analysis. The story of Christ's apostles—Thaddeus and Bartholomew—coming to Armenia is one such story from which we can deduce that the Armenian's had a need to claim apostolic origins. The Armenian Church has gone to great pains to prove her apostolic origins and suc-

cession—even to a point where she has dropped the title "orthodox" from the official name of the church—to substantiate and prove a point. What is substantiated however, is that the Armenian Church, a very small player in the ecumenical movement, resorts to apology to maintain her distinctiveness among churches of greater followings.

A WORKING TRILOGY

The Armenian Church is "unique" in Christendom and so are her myths. In particular, three classic myths continue to meet the test of time for Armenians, who recount and enjoy hearing them to the present day: 1) The Enlightenment of Armenia by St. Gregory the Illuminator; 2) The God-inspired creation of the Armenian alphabet; 3) The epic battle of Vartanantz. These myths are perpetuated because they *work*, i.e., they convey the basic truths of Armenian Church glory.

Moreover, these three myths express dominant themes which are common to all myths and fit the mythological configurations. In studying myths, it is accepted that most fall into one of three categories: creation myths; origin of a divine being; renewal and rebirth of the world. As the Armenian Church has tried to define herself to her children



throughout the centuries, she has quite capably used these stories to further perpetuate the myths. St. Gregory's conversion of King Tirtad and the Armenian people is the "creation myth" of the Armenian Church. It allows for someone from the *outside*, in this case a Parthenian, to set up shop, be rejected and later glorified; someone who ultimately effectuates change. The story of Vartanantz, likewise, epitomizes renewal and rebirth, despite the odds and adversaries (of the *David and Goliath* genre). As for the origin of divine beings, is there any example more pronounced than the creation of the Armenian alphabet? What began as a simple *means* of conveying the Gospel to the people, has, throughout the centuries, assumed a personality of its own and today the alphabet is *deified* in poetry and prose.

A myth will perpetuate only if it has a useful function. In this respect, these three Armenian myths work. But what about those myths which are held so near and dear to the heart of the people that they—these myths—defy and even contradict each other? The Armenian Church herself falls into such a category. The people perceive the Church, Her functionaries and Her "mission" in a *mythic* context. Poet Vahan Tekeyan expresses this sentiment quite pleasantly by claiming that, "The Armenian Church is the birthplace of [his] soul... ." While enumerating the virtues of the Armenian Church, Tekeyan deifies her to a point beyond contemplation and criticism.

TESTING THE MYTH

A few years ago, a collection of stories written by Vahé Oshagan, in Armenian, entitled *Tagartin Shoorch* (*Around the trap*, New York: Vosgedar Publications, 1988), caused controversy in the Armenian media. The story in question was called *Odzoom* (Consecration). In this piece, Oshagan tests the power of the Armenian myth, vis-a-vis the Church and attempts to underline the fact that many times, the self-created and recreated myth of the Armenian leads him to isolation from universal human values. For Oshagan, the *power* of the Armenian myth is in its universal dimension. Unlike the common perception, the Armenian myth should not be a device for separation

and rejection, but rather a means to elevate the person to a higher level of understanding.

The *Odzoom* (pp. 39-142) takes place in Philadelphia, in a St. Sarkis Armenian Church. The time is winter and there is snow on the ground. The story begins with a scenario very familiar to clergy serving in America and could have come from any parish priest's diary.

The opening scene begins with Fr. Avedis, the parish priest, going to church at 7:00 AM. Almost like a ritual, he first opens the *Agoomp* (club), makes the coffee and then proceeds to open the *Hokapartzoutyan Ofis* (parish council office). Subsequently, Oshagan describes in detail the characters who come to church. They come to church for every conceivable reason, except religion. Indirectly, each personality reveals the various characteristics of the false myth: the chairman of the parish

council and his "attitude;" two women sitting in the church and talking about what they did during the week; a Hagop Arakelian, whose wife had just died in Cairo, comes to church with his Buick ("he went to the bathroom, urinated, held his p... and stood for a long time... [than he] combed his hair, came into the church and made the sign of the cross..."); the hyphenated Armenians and their idiosyncrasies—Iranian-Armenians, Beirut-Armenians, American Armenians... . A total of 16 people come to church on that Sunday: ten of them in the church and six in the parish council *ofis*.

During the Divine Liturgy, the priest looks tired, because of back pain experienced the night before. He is sleepy and thinks that the choir is singing wrong again. The deacons must remind the priest of his line. The priest surmises, "My god [sic], we are going to say the same

Vahé Oshagan: Anti-Clericalism? Or Stripping the Myth?

Excerpts from *Odzoom*...

—Look, I'm going to the altar by myself, my purpose is to destroy the priest in his ridiculous vestments, [his] useless garments, [I'm going] to tear them apart one by one and throw them away, until he is left with his underwear — those *sh-ty* underwear.

—At first, I had decided to bring to the altar a black common woman, to undress him there, to *f--k* him.

— Our job is to dismantle that magic, it is to open the prison of our sexual energies, in a most ferocious way... in the church.

— And to give a strong blow to the testicles of Armenians, we will kill the tongue by not speaking it, we will destroy the priest, and screw the moral from its vital principles.

—The Armenian language is not a language to give a speech, teach, write an encyclical, speak with God, pray... it does not bring husband and wife together, it is not a language of intimacy.

— The young man jumped to the altar, tore apart the vestments of the priest with a dagger and dropped his robe (*shoochar*), he violently tore his *vagas*, his white and neat shirt and undershirt. Within five seconds, Fr. Avedis's delicate and heavy garments were compiled under his feet. Suddenly, a naked body appeared there, in front of the altar, a crown on his head and below that an underwear, with a big line of dirt or *sh-t* behind it.

—A rag, give me a rag, screamed Fr. Avedis, to cover my *d-ck*.

—He thought of a rag around him but only the cover of the chalice was there....

WARNING:

Course language.
Reader
discretion
advised.

thing again...we've said it a thousand times. I wish there was a bed here...."

A young Armenian, named Bruce, who is a former member of ASALA, enters the scene with two other characters, Jacques and Sona. They speak about starting a revolution in the Church. They believe that, "if Armenians really love and believe in their church, they will rise against [them]..." They stipulate that everyone in the church "should comply... if not," Bruce says, "we will burn the church... I am *hayrenaser* (patriot) and that is why I will do this." Bruce, Jacques and Sona, dressed in black, enter the church. Nobody knows who they are. Sitting in the church, while the Liturgy is being conducted, they turn on a transistor radio and jazz music interrupts the service. They cover their faces with masks. They begin discussing national concerns, the Tashnags, the Church, America, life, etc. Jacques says, "We should destroy the myth... That is why I want you [Sona] to kiss in the church standing on the pews."

"While we do this," he contends, "the people should not know that we are Armenians... because we are then a part of the myth; if we are identified with it, we cannot destroy it... we are the non-Armenian, we are the Anti-Armenian... Church, religion, God are not worth anything for the Armenian."

Bruce lights a cigarette in the church. Jacques and Sona get up on the pew and start kissing. The people start to panic and try to stop them, yet they are hesitant to approach them. "...as the myth was momentarily broken, the couple jump down from the pew... Fr. Avedis resumes the Liturgy saying, 'Blessed is God the Holy Spirit.'"

The conversation continues among the three young characters. "...my opponent is not the church people. It is the priest, if I can bring him to the ground, everybody will be finished... you should provoke the people and they will go crazy."

The three young characters create havoc in the church. People are fighting, using profane language, screaming, etc. One of the young men gets up on the altar and strips the vestments of the priest off his

back. When the people see the priest naked, they start laughing in amusement. However, the priest continues to read the prayers of the Liturgy, undisturbed with all the commotion. Suddenly, Fr. Avedis realizes his embarrassing position. He was being put to shame nakedly before "the altar of Armenians, in the palm of the Church and before the god [sic] of Armenians..."

After a momentary outburst and rebellion against God, the priest continues the Liturgy. A fight breaks out and one of the instigators of the chaos is wounded with a knife. He

One priest branded him as the Salman Rushdie of the Armenians...

lays on the altar covered with blood. As he lays on the floor, the priest with tears in his eyes, comes and gives him communion, saying "Holy Blood for remission of your sins." The priest then kisses the forehead of the wounded young man with a forgiving smile. The wounded man lifts his head with great difficulty, and with a soft voice, whispers, "*Der Hayr*, (Reverend Father) you are stronger than us."

Following this incident, through the thoughts and voices of the characters, Oshagan begins to analyze the event, its taboos and myths. Here are some of the thoughts of the characters:

"...We should have gone all the way, there wasn't a big shock. . . that's why I fought with you [in the church]... the people should have suffered, they should have seen their priest like that. I wanted to break the taboos of sex, to show them that the

p.... is an ordinary, natural organ, it is an instrument of pleasure and not of shame, sin and transgression... I should have broken the myth. With the myth, the imposition of the centuries, the fear of the Turk, and the fear of the massacres would have gone..."

"... still myth has power, at least for certain people."

"...revolution should be heartless, heartless, heartless."

"...there were no youth in the church, if there were, many things would have been changed that day..."

"...we started with the church, perhaps we should have started with the [Armenian] political parties. They also live with myths, at least the Tashnags and the Hunchags..."

"... [The priest] was a brave man."

As might be expected, following the publication of *Odzoom*, Oshagan was severely criticized by both clergy and laity for his "rude" and "foul" language and concepts. One priest branded him as the *Salman Rushdie of the Armenians*. Yet, Oshagan plays the ultimate trick. At first, he challenges the "myth" by breaking the taboo in writing; and secondly, he creates a community wide shock response to his fiction, thus challenging the conventions of the myth within the Armenian community. How would Armenians react to the defamation of their church and priest? For sure, Oshagan found that the reactions in real life Armenian community were no different than those he presented in his tale. Interestingly enough, the critics of *Odzoom* make no mention of the "myth," they rather arbitrarily use out-of-context sound bites from the story to sensationalize their own criticism and treatise.

To reduced *Odzoom* to a mere expression of offensive and crude thoughts is to miss its point. In essence, the story deals with the core of Armenian problems, i.e., the people's fascination with their own myth. Oshagan's use of graphic and strong language literally hits the issue in the chops. At the conclusion of

continued on page 18

A Sacrifice of Praise:

BLESSING OF MADAGH

Dn Michael Findikyan

A ceremony which is unique to the Armenian church is the ritual of the Blessing of *Madagh*. In this ceremony an animal such as a chicken, dove or lamb is brought to a special stone altar in the courtyard of the church. There the priest blesses salt, feeds it to the animal and offers special prayers, psalms and hymns. Then the animal is led away to a separate building where it is slaughtered.

The ritual, which because of the ignorance and apathy of the officiating clergy has been abbreviated and ritualized to the point of meaninglessness, has become the victim of the same fate as the slaughtered beast. According to current pietistic customs, after the brief ceremony, the person offering the madagh rushes home with the meat of the sacrifice and gives a portion of it to each of seven neighbors. After that, they cook the remaining meat and host a festive (and sometimes raucous) day-long celebration with the participation of relatives, friends and neighbors.

This ritual is very common in Armenia, where people offer a madagh sacrifice as a pious gesture on various occasions: upon the baptism or

wedding of a child, on a birthday, to honor a special guest, or as a memorial to a loved one on the anniversary of his death.

But visitors to Armenia are regularly horrified and repulsed when they witness the seemingly barbaric ritual, so unlike the decorous ceremonies they have seen in the Armenian Church in the west. Others remember the universal Christian teaching that Christ's death on the cross became the final and ultimate sacrifice, rendering any others superfluous. They accuse the Church of perpetuating an obsolete Jewish custom, thereby denigrating the saving act of Christ and the entire new covenant. Indeed, this ambivalence regarding the madagh reaches back

to at least the time of St. Nersess the Gracefilled (11th century), who found it necessary to devote a portion of his famous pastoral encyclical to defending Madagh against the attacks of those who called it a "Jewish sacrifice." At the same time he corrects errors which had crept into the performance of the ritual.

To determine whether such objections are legitimate, one need only turn to the words of the rite itself. First, however, it is essential to understand the concept of sacrifice as witnessed in the Old Testament.

ATONEMENT BY SACRIFICE

According to Jewish understanding as revealed in the Old Testament, the one God dwells among his people Israel and in return for his promise of blessings, he expects above all their absolute acknowledgement that he alone is God. This they must demonstrate by unwavering obedience to his will. The first commandment makes this clear: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods besides me." [Ex 20:2-3] A transgression is therefore dangerous not so much in itself, but rather because it represents a lapse in obedience which calls into question the community's absolute allegiance to God.

Consequently, to become reconciled with God, a sinner must make atonement for his transgressions. This is much more than "paying for

your sins." It means that in the wake of his aberrant behavior, the transgressor must do something to once again prove beyond any doubt his utter fidelity to God. Offering a sacrifice is the only way this can be done. When one takes something of great value and offers it to God for His sole use, this is a radical and unmistakable, ontological affirmation of one's allegiance to God. When Abraham, following God's instructions, took his son Isaac to a mountain, gathered wood, laid it on him and "took in his hand the fire and the knife," "Abraham was prepared to make the ultimate ontological demonstration of his total commitment to the One who said to him, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love...and offer him...as a burnt offering..." [Gen 22:2] There is no other rational explanation why a man would kill and burn his own son: Either he is lunatic, or he actually believes in the voice of Him who instructed him to do this.

The Old Testament is replete with examples of individuals—and at times the entire nation—making animal sacrifices to God to atone for their sins. The opening of the book of Leviticus, which is appointed to be read during the madagh ceremony, describes the manner in which a person should make offerings to the Lord: "If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it at the door of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the Lord...and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. Then he shall kill the bull before the Lord; and Aaron's sons the priests [the "Levites", hence "Leviticus"] shall present the blood, and throw the blood round about against the altar that is at the door of the tent of meeting. And he shall flay the burnt offering and cut it into pieces; and the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar, and lay wood in order upon the fire; and Aaron's sons the priests shall lay the pieces, the head, and the fat, in order upon the wood that is on the fire upon the altar...And the priest shall burn the whole on the altar, as a burnt offering, an offering by fire, a pleasing odor

to the Lord." [Lev 1:3-9]

Blood was considered the seat of life, and throwing the blood around the altar was understood to be an essential element of the ritual of sacrifice for atonement. More important, however, is the notion that the animal to be offered was "without blemish." (*Madagh* means literally soft, tender, delicate, young; these describe the kind of animal which is suitable for sacrifice). Offering a deformed or sick animal to God would not be a true sacrifice, and would amount to a half-hearted affirmation of God. To be effective, the one offering a sacri-

*...the emphasis of
Madagh is not
atonement for sins,
but rather
worship
and charity...*

fice must choose a prized possession (as Abraham did), slaughter it at the altar of the One God (thereby dedicating it to him) and then after giving a portion to the officiating priests, burn the remains totally and completely, thereby assuring that God is the sole beneficiary of the sacrifice. No part of the animal may remain, and/or be eaten or used in any way. This is the power of the ritual. To destroy an animal (or other prized possession) and effectively "waste" it is absurd. The only other explanation is that the person destroying the animal is not wasting it, but dedicating it to an unseen but living deity, and *ipso facto* affirming his fidelity to that deity. Note that God has no particular need for charred animal carcasses; but he is pleased by the faith affirmation of those who make sacrifices in his name.

CHRIST'S ETERNAL REDEMPTION

Of the five scripture readings appointed to be read during the ceremony of the Blessing of *Madagh*, three of them deal with the tradi-

tional Old Testament use of atoning sacrifice (Lev 1:1-9; 2Sam 6:17-19; Is 56:6-7). But the prescribed New Testament readings make it clear that even though the Madagh ceremony is rooted in the sacrificial rituals of the Old Testament, however it does not at all contradict or in any way minimize Christ's ultimate sacrifice on the cross.

The Epistle to the Hebrews includes the most explicit assertion of Christ's redemptive sacrifice in the New Testament: "But until Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through

the greater and more perfect tent...he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead

works to serve the living God." [9:11-14] The Blessing of Madagh ceremony includes a passage from the end of this argument which suggests that the emphasis of Madagh is *not* atonement for sins, but rather worship and charity: "Through [Jesus Christ] let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." [Heb 13:15-16] Madagh is the actualization of these two mandates: "Offer up a sacrifice of praise," and "share what you have."

Indeed this is confirmed by the prescribed gospel reading from Luke: "He also said to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid



at the resurrection of the just." [14:12-14] It is clear that the compilers of this rite have made it their duty to affirm the traditional use of animal sacrifice, while providing a different purpose for the ritual. This is proven beyond any doubt in the prayer of blessing.

SHADOW OF TRUE SALVATION

The author of the prayer clearly recognizes that the slaughter of animals is not expected by God and is no longer efficacious for the atonement of sins. He affirms that God has no "need" for a sacrifice, or anything else, when he addresses God as the "Saviour who lacks nothing." He also quotes Psalms 50 and 51 in which God rejects animal sacrifices in favor of "a broken heart and a humble spirit." Though the prayer establishes that in former times God was pleased by the sacrifices offered by mankind, such as the sacrifices of Abel, Noah and Abraham, nevertheless *true* salvation results from Christ's coming into the world and the tradition of offering animal sacrifice is a mere "shadow of the true salvation to come."

Nevertheless, avowing all of this, the author boldly beseeches God to receive this sacrifice the same way he accepted the sacrifices of our forefathers, "as a burnt offering of rams and bulls and as ten thousand fattened lambs." But again in the next breath the prayer declares that we will not rejoice in this sacrifice, but "in your salvation," in "the spotless faith of the Holy Trinity," and in the "power of the sign of your all-conquering cross."

Therefore we have in this prayer a confession of the power of sacrifice to please God with the acknowledgement that salvation comes only from Christ. We must conclude that in *Madagh*, the Armenians have preserved what they consider a radical act of faith affirmation. Standing with Christ on the ephemeral bounds of the old and new covenants, they utilize the ritual of animal sacrifice for its supreme ontological value as an indisputable demonstration of faith and worship, and simultaneously they make a definitive and eloquent confession of Christ as saviour. In this sense, the rite is a real *tour de force*.

Furthermore, the New Testament readings indicate that the emphasis



© 1997 Christen People

It seems gruesome to many, only because our sterile modern culture insulates us from the vivid details of what is, for most of the world, a daily and rather mundane task.

in this rite is not on the slaughter of animals, much less for the atonement of sins. Instead, there is a clear emphasis on charity. Clearly the meat from the sacrifice is intended to be fed to "the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind." Unlike the Jewish sacrifice, there is no evidence in this rite to suggest that slaughtering the animal is anything more than the necessary means to this end. It seems gruesome to many only because our sterile modern western culture insulates us from the vivid details of what is, for most of the world, a daily and rather mundane task.

MADAGH IN MILWAUKEE?

In the Armenian Churches of the United States, the rite of *Madagh* has been reduced to the serving of dainty boiled lamb finger sandwiches after the Divine Liturgy on April 24, in commemoration of the martyrs of 1915. As such, the modern-day ritual lacks what we have found are the two essential elements of the ceremony, personal sacrifice and charity. It follows that in this guise, the ceremony is equally anemic as an act of affirmation of faith in God. Instead of striving to preserve the original spirit and purpose of the ritual, we have

mindlessly preserved its physical elements, which, in twenty-first century America, are ripped out of their intended context.

What is needed is a creative reunification of ritual and context. It is not necessary to slaughter animals on the steps of the Armenian Church in Milwaukee, Fresno or Montreal. What matters is that the *donation* be a sacrifice. In the same way that in former times a person sacrificed an "unblemished" young animal, the meat of which is food for many days, and the fur of which is clothing for many people, likewise today, a *Madagh* offering must have such value that the person offering it feels the loss of that which he has given up. In sacrifice, the hurt of loss is transformed into the joy of giving and of pleasing God.

Beyond the sacrifice itself, the gospel passage from the rite declares that all the fruits of the sacrifice must be given to "the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind..." No part should be enjoyed by "your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbors." These deserve our charity as well, but the fruits of *Madagh* are reserved for those who "cannot repay you."

continued on next page

FYI: The United States Supreme Court has agreed to decide if the First Amendment allows towns to ban the killing of animals as part of religious ceremonies. The court next term will review four ordinances from Hialeah, Fla., enacted when adherents of the ancient African religion of Santeria - who practice animal sacrifice - announced plans to open a church. A federal district court and the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the regulations, saying they do not violate freedom of religion because they are meant to protect public health and prevent inhumane treatment of animals. But the practitioners of Santeria, backed by a number of religious liberty advocates, argue the laws amount to a new and ominous form of religious discrimination. (Source: UPI)

PRAYER OF MADAGH

Almighty God, you are praised by the highest heavenly orders and you are worshiped by those of the earthly realm, O God the Word, with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

In the beginning you imprinted the shape and example of the good things to come. For although mankind fell from his rightful place in paradise by the instinctive artifice of the

crafty deceiver [Satan], who made promises of noble glory, nevertheless when mankind multiplied and became numerous upon the earth, you were pleased by the pious deeds we offered to you as sacrifices upon the altar.

Like the sacrifice of Abel, who by being sacrificed, was called just; and Noah, when he left the ark, offered there a fragrant oblation to you for God. And Abraham, being tested, offered the true burnt offering and typified your incorruptible death on the cross.

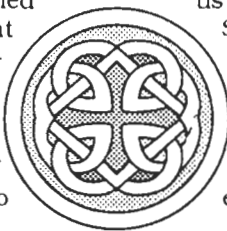
And therefore, O Lord our beneficent God, we ask and beg you, receive from us by your mercy this gift, for the pleasure of your all-powerful will.

Receive, O Lord our loving God this gift which we have promised and pledged to you in our affliction, when we called to you and you saved us.

Receive, O provident God this sacrifice which we lift up and offer to you, O Saviour who lacks nothing, whose mercy and compassion are incomprehensible and infinite.

Receive [it], O compassionate Lord and liken it to the blessed offerings of the holy forefathers, and dissociate it from the false sacrifices and pagan burnt offerings of satanic idolatry.

By Moses your holy and blessed prophet you commanded your people Israel to offer you burnt offerings. And by other holy ones, [you commanded that] animals be brought to the door of the tent of meeting before the Levite priests. By placing their hand upon [the animal] and letting its blood flow upon your holy altar. O God, transgressions were forgiven and prayers were answered. But this was [only] a shadow of the true salvation to come, which was granted to us by your coming into the world.



For you yourself, O most-merciful and beneficent Lord, by your prophetic spirit, said through your prophet, "I do not accept your fattened bulls. Rather offer to God an offering of blessing, and willfully offer a bloodless offering—a broken heart and a humble spirit, which God will not despise" [Ps. 50:9; 51:17].

But now, we sinners who are unworthy fall down before your compassion with humble hearts and we beg you for the great love [you showed to] your beloved ones, our fathers.

Look down upon this our offering and receive it from us as a burnt offering of rams and bulls and as ten thousand fattened lambs.

Answer our prayers, O Lord, so that we not be put to shame before our enemies. But rather let us delight and rejoice in your salvation.

For if by your gaze you can weigh all the mountains and the hills and the fields; and you hold heaven and earth in your hand, and you are seated in the highest heights upon the throne of the cherubim and hell is not invisible to you; and if giving you all the four-footed beasts and all the animals [in the world] is still not sufficient as a burnt offering to you, then how do we dare to offer [you] a sacrifice?

But you, O Lord, were pleased to become incarnate for us, and by your holy apostles you taught us the spotless faith which is the Holy Trinity, by which you made us worthy to be called brothers and sons by your incorruptible body and blood, O God the Word.

Now, therefore, O miraculous Lord, receive from our hands this gift of sacrifice by the intercession of the holy Mother of God, and by the power of the sign of your all-conquering cross which we worship continually.

And by the prayers of the holy apostles and prophets and the blessed martyrs who shed their blood in return for your blood, O Lord, grant the petitions of those who make this offering and grant them forgiveness of their sins. Increase the flocks and the herds and all animals and the prosperity of your servants. Make the clouds rain sweetly upon our fields and grant the fruit of profit, and dispel from us the snares of Satan.

So that standing here in piety and in your pleasure, we might be worthy to meet you when you are revealed in your glory on that awesome day when you come again from heaven to apportion [to us] according to our works. For you are worthy of glory, dominion and honor, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

continued from previous page

Finally, sacrifice and charity come together when standing before the altar, the offering is made to God reading the words of the prayer.

Recently five students went to a grocery store and pooling their limited money, they bought 40 pounds of chicken. That night, with great care they washed the chicken pieces, placed them on baking sheets, flavored them with spices and baked them. Later they wrapped each piece individually

and placed them all in large cardboard boxes. The next evening they brought the boxes to church, and placed this sacrifice at the foot of the holy altar. Standing reverently in the quiet peace of the darkened church, they read aloud the appointed passages from Leviticus, from 2 Samuel, and from Isaiah and following those, passages from Hebrews and the Gospel according to Luke. One of them then stepped forward, in the midst of the saran-wrapped offering, and read the words

of the prayer: "...Receive from us by your mercy this gift, for the pleasure of your all-powerful will. Receive, O Lord our loving God this gift which we have promised and pledged to you...Receive, O provident God this sacrifice which we lift up and offer to you...Receive it, O compassionate Lord and liken it to the blessed offerings of the holy forefathers..."

Having made their offering, they proceeded downtown, where they fed those "who cannot repay you."

A Bishop in Cassock & Reeboks

The one most striking and unexpected discovery made by Dn. Michael Findikyan, during his one year stay in Armenia was that the Armenian community in the United States was worlds removed from the ancestral homeland. The disparity which confronted this young American was often shocking. "I struggled with an Armenian language very different from my father's Armenian and from the Armenian I studied for five years; I found a thought-process in the Armenians very different from my own way of thinking. Moreover, I discovered that the Church in Armenia has an entirely different set of issues and problems to face than in America. This unexpected disparity between the Church's operation in Armenia and in America proved very frustrating for me at times." Yet probing this tension can be both healthy and creative for both worlds. —eds.

One day I was chatting with Bishop Karekin Nersissian in his spacious office on the second floor of the Diocesan center in Yerevan which is the hub of the Araratian Diocese. "What are you doing Sunday?" he asked with his typical breathless alacrity. "Good. Be here at 9:00. I'm taking my kids up to Mount Aragadz. We're going to do Badarak in a twelfth-century church..."

I had long since made it a general policy while in Armenia to say "yes" to anyone offering me anything that didn't seem overtly immoral. This policy was in keeping with the generally impulsive flow of life in Armenia,

and it assured me of taking advantage of every diverse opportunity in my limited time in the homeland. Besides, experience had shown me that Bishop Karekin's enterprises were usually unconventional and adventuresome.

On Sunday morning I took a cab for the twenty-five minute ride from Etchmiadzin to the ever-bustling St. Sarkis Church in Yerevan, which sits adjacent to the Diocesan Center and Bishop Karekin's office. Today was not unlike any June day in Yerevan: hot and dry, the sun beating down intensely on the dusty Armenian earth. Two lines of busses, parked on both sides of the road, at first blocked my view of the church. Passing them, I was confronted by two or three hundred Armenian teenagers scurrying around. These are Bishop Karekin's "kids." They represent the sum total of the participants in the various programs which the Bishop has set up in his diocese for the young people: two choirs, a dance group, a drama group, a Bible Study group, two English language classes, and a diocesan youth publication. I knew many of the kids: Armand, "Moogooch" (Mgrditch), Lilit, Shahé, Mariné, Kevork, Hasmig, Artur, Samuel... You can't possibly miss them—they're the die-hards who participate in every youth activity in the diocese, and thus are at church every day.

And there in the middle of it all, was the bishop, in his cassock and Reeboks, his monastic cowl ("Veghar") in one hand, a bright blue soccer ball in the other, shouting directions at the bus drivers and trying to fend the kids off of him and into the busses. Needless to say, in trousers and clerical shirt, I was overdressed. And grinning, the bishop wasted no time making me aware of that.

So off we went in caravan out of the hot city and onto the winding road up Mt. Aragadz, the tallest mountain within the Republic of Armenia. As we travelled up the mountain the air became gradually cool and crisp, and the landscape grew harsher, jagged rocky cliffs plunging into the earth. At first the edifices were mere pebbles on the horizon, but they became larger and larger as we climbed

toward them.

Amberd is the name of the fortress which soon gazed down at us, its hundred foot walls partially crumbled, but steadfast in the strong mountain wind. One hundred yards away stood the church, its doors sealed for centuries. The two structures stood stoically along a steep ridge.

The Divine Liturgy, the first celebrated in this church in centuries, was choreographed by the bishop as a celebration of the youth. The young celebrant had been ordained a priest only a few weeks before; nine teenage students from the Seminary of Sevan served at the stone altar; the choir was composed of sixty young people who practice at St. Sarkis twice a week, and the soloist was none other than an eleven year old boy graced with an angelic voice. Dozens drew near to receive the Lord's body and blood in holy communion.

Then the fun started. With the sun shining down at mid-day, the hundreds of young people and their families separated into groups and claimed flat patches of grass, where they set out colorful blankets, and baskets of crusty bread, cheese, chicken and the early harvest of cucumbers, tomatoes, diverse greens, apples, peaches, and watermelon. Within minutes after the Liturgy had ended, this mountainside became a checkerboard of picnic blankets, with young people eating, singing, dancing and running as far as the eye could see. Here were young Armenians tromping over their land; seemingly extracting every ounce of bliss from of the clean, mountain air, the bright blue sky and the Armenian soil. With the nasal tones of the doudouk wailing in the background, hundreds of Armenian kids were having good, clean fun, the ancient church and massive fortress watching with care from above.



Chrismation

in the Oriental Orthodox Church

Fr Garabed D. Kochakian

A sacrament is to be understood as a 'gift' and not merely a liturgical act; therefore reference to the 'Sacrament of Chrismation' is best stated as a grace 'given' rather than a performed liturgical rite. The explication set forth is primarily based upon the ceremony celebrated in the Armenian Orthodox tradition, however the theology of the sacrament itself is consonant and in compliance with the Christological understanding among all the Oriental Orthodox Churches; namely, the Syrian Orthodox, the Coptic Orthodox, the Ethiopian Orthodox and Syrian Orthodox Church of India otherwise known as Malabar.

In the tradition of all the national Oriental Orthodox Churches the Sacrament of Chrismation is more clearly understood within the context of the tripartite rite variously called THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION that includes the Holy Sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation

Fr. Kochakian is the chancellor of the Eastern Diocese of North America. This paper was presented at a meeting of the Oriental Orthodox-Roman Catholic National Bilateral talks in the United States. It was part of a study session concerning the theological significance of the Sacrament of Holy Chrismation as it is celebrated in the various Oriental Orthodox Churches.

and Communion in that precise order of administration. Indeed, each is a separate gift of Divine Grace yet the blessings of each sacrament that are imparted to the recipient become conjoined finally with the essence of the Holy Trinity that has clothed the individual with Divine Adoption, the Energies and Gifts of the Holy Spirit and Membership into the Mystical Body of Christ that is the Holy Church. We understand that sacramental graces are unique and particular. But, at the same time they collectively and cohesively co-operate with each other as the life of the Christian develops in the Holy Church.

Therefore, the three sacraments within the rite of Christian Initiation are essential to the *wholeness and wholesomeness* of the life of every believer. The road toward salvation is opened through the spiritual bath of Baptism in water and is generated with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit by the anointing rite of Chrismation. Finally salvation is assured with the reception of the Body and Blood of the Lord, the Christ. These three Sacraments when administered in this sequential manner introduce the neophyte to the experience and hope of Salvation.

Oriental Orthodoxy affirms that one's spiritual development, growth, maturation and fortification can only come about by a consistent exposure

and unified 'experience' of God's grace. Therefore this faith experience is the way to salvation.

Conforming to early church practice of immediate inclusiveness, i.e. persons of every age and gender, Oriental Orthodoxy adheres to the belief that everyone should immediately identify with the community and become truly part of the community in all things; from the waters of the font, by and through the Spirit, to the table of the Lord. All these moments of grace are essential and important.

It is difficult to speak about the Sacrament of Chrismation in an isolated fashion without maintaining a constant regard for and reference to the water rite of Baptism. In fact, the action of Chrismation, unfolds within the baptismal rite when the water itself is anointed. Therefore it will be important to refer periodically to the water blessing in the 'font' as the meaning of the anointing sacrament is further explored and explicated.

THE WATER RITE

The mystery of Baptism is the beginning of the life in Christ, causing men to exist, live and excel in true life and being. From the eternal point of view, baptism incorporates a person as a child of the Eternal Heavenly Father into the 'Body of Christ'. Through and by the grace of this sacrament, one has been purchased

outright by God Our Father and begins to develop a new spiritual life which sets him/her free from sin, making possible one's reconciliation with God. With these Divine Graces there is a completed and harmonious unity with God.

Water is one of the primary, most ancient and universal of all religious symbols. There can be no life without water yet paradoxically it can destroy and annihilate life. Sacred scripture reveals in the Old Testament that through the blessed water, God is present: *The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, upon many waters. (Psalm 29:3)*

Without the presence of God, humankind is doomed. But as the psalmist's declaration reveals, his power-filled presence assures the redemptive and salvific action within all creation. When consecrated, water indeed does save as it acquires the very *breath of God*; permeating all created beings with his holy presence.

In the actual rite of blessing, in particular both the Armenian and Syrian rites, water is anointed with the Holy Chrism (Meron) and is infused with the Holy Spirit and presence of the Christ. Saint Ambrose comments on this divine epiphany saying, "The water does not heal if the Spirit does not descend to consecrate it. The water which has the grace of Christ heals."

The *Prayer Over the Water* that appears in the Armenian rite is an *Epiclesis* addressed to the Holy Spirit requesting Divine action and descent for the sanctification of the water.

We now therefore pray thee, O Lord, send thine Holy Spirit into this water and sanctify the same....And grant that this water... be unto him/her for the remission of sins and for the reception of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Chrism is used not only to sanctify the water but to permeate it. The water truly becomes the 'Christ Clothing' into which the catechumen is immersed. Finally, the newly Baptized is attired by donning a spiritual 'Garment of Salvation'.

Christ now dwells in the water which washes, cleanses, forgives,

saves and finally clothes. This is verbally proclaimed by the priest, "You that have been baptized in Christ and *have put on Christ*. Alleluia. You that have been enlightened in the Father, the Holy Spirit shall rejoice in you. Alleluia."

CHRISMATION

The Chrismation rite is uniquely understood as the *Baptism with the Holy Spirit*. Yet it still refers to the water rite whereon the Spirit first hovered.

It is important to understand its the origin and semiotic character. In the Old Testament writings, anointing is first associated with authority. On the direct command of God, Moses received the tradition of the authority of the priesthood, kingship and

any other kind of liquid.

Like water, oil has also acquired a functional purpose in creation and as been likewise seen as an emblem of grace. It has been used as medicine for healing, fuel to create light and warmth and as food to sustain life. Moreover, oil is a symbol of reconciliation and peace.

After the Great Flood, a dove, bearing in its mouth a branch from an olive tree, came to Noah and assured him of the end of the flood, of God's forgiveness and of his own reconciliation with the Almighty Lord God (Genesis 8:11). Thus, this oil from the fruit of the olive tree encumbers a number of semiotic allusions; as an act of redemption and reconciliation, a sign of protection and safety, a sign of authority, leadership, commission and creation of new life. But most importantly, it signifies that God's covenant with all of humankind since creation has not been abandoned but has been faithfully kept as *Promise*. This covenant is to restore all things to Himself; those things in heaven and on earth. With and by this oil, He is present and all who are sealed and anointed by this oil are imbued with His presence as proclaimed by the Holy Prophet Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me with oil, he has sent me to bring the good news to the poor." (Isaiah 61:1)

It is therefore essential to understand this prelude to the actual Sacramental rite of Chrismation. In the ritual this holy oil not only conveys the symbolisms already explained but more importantly effectuates the mystical presence of Christ's Holy Spirit. Finally through unction our own mystical transformation is made possible by the grace given with the Blessed Meron *The Oil of Gladness*.

Thus, oil is used to *seal, consecrate, validate and establish* the presence of the Kingdom made manifest upon those whom this mark of anointing has been placed. Protection, sanctification commission and ministry are all effectuated by the mystical power and grace of the Holy Spirit with the oil which marks and identifies the believer.

The sacraments are each individual gifts of grace and simultaneously components of wholeness of the soul and spirit

prophecy (Exodus 28:1; 19:10). This theophany to Moses on Mount Sinai was a type of sealing or sign, that imbued him with the authority to establish the priesthood. Although Moses, at first, anointed Aaron as a priest, the rite of anointing that later developed in the Hebraic tradition imparted an authority associated with 'kingship' as well. It was first used by Samuel, in the anointing of King David (1 Kings 16:1) and then in the anointing of Saul, (1 Kings 10:1). Yet the ritual of anointing raises a question concerning the particular usage of oil as a symbol of God's salvific power and authority and not

Anointing as Seal

As a seal oil is used to mark those called to salvation granting protection to them as explained in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament, "And the Lord said to him, go through the city of Jerusalem and set a mark upon the foreheads...touch not any man upon whom is the mark." (Ezekiel 9: 4-6)

With this oil of Chrism, *Meron*, those who are marked and anointed with it become God's full possession; saved...and...sanctified.

Furthermore, the anointed ones become participants in process of *theosis*, i.e. taking part in the Divine Nature of God. Hence, this Orthodox doctrine is made manifest by this heavenly grace imparted and given with the particular Sacrament of Chrismation.

Thus Chrismation spurs these dynamics of Divine Power; Theophany, Sanctification and Theosis. They are both inherently present and operative in the life of the believer. The holy unction with *Meron* is truly *God's act of claiming full possession of us who he has purchased outright* through the water rite of Baptism though not yet removed [us] to his own warehouse (Kingdom).

The Holy Chrism

This particular oil is called *Chrism* that derives its name from the Greek word "Chrismata" which itself means anointing. It is also known by the word of Semitic origin *Myron* or *Meron*, [in Armenian *Miuron*] which means sweet ointment. The Chrism used in the Sacrament fundamentally consists of olive oil mixed with the precious balsam perfumes and essences of forty-eight kinds of flowers and other sweet smelling herbs and ingredients.

The actual prescription for preparing a type of *Meron/Chrism* oil that serves as a paradigm to such oils prepared today is explained in the second book of the Pentateuch:

Moreover the Lord said to Moses, 'Take the finest spices; of liquid myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet smelling cinnamon half as much, that is, two hundred

and fifty, and of aromatic cone two hundred and fifty, and of cassia five hundred, according to the shekel of the sanctuary and of olive oil, a hin; and of these you shall make a sacred anointing oil blended as by the perfumes, a holy anointing oil it shall be...and you shall anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests, and you shall say to the people of Israel, This shall be my holy anointing oil throughout your generation. (Exodus 30; 22-30)

It is with such oil that Christians are anointed and become a "Royal People", imbued and dressed with a Christ-like essence, as Saint Cyril of Jerusalem explains, "Take care not to imagine that this Myron is anything ordinary... (but) after the

*Through
Chrismation,
humankind is
born in the Spirit
and progresses
toward
perfection.*

epiclesis, but the charism of Christ, made efficacious of the Holy Spirit by the presence of His Divinity." The sacred scriptures further clarify the significance of this oil as the very essence and presence of Christ Our God, "Your name is ointment poured upon me." (Canticle 1: 3)

The Chrism is the Lord Jesus THE CHRIST Himself. The Spirit of Jesus called *Christos* (the Anointed One Gk.) is this *Meron*, sweet anointing ointment, the mystical and spirit-filled presence of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Lord God—the hypostasis of Godhead and manhood.

With the celebration of the rite of Chrismation, humankind immediately experiences *Theosis* and at once participates in the Divine Nature of

God. We become that which is poured upon us (cf. Canticle 1:3). "It is as though the vessel of the alabaster were by some means to become the chrism it contains." (cf. Mark 14: 3)

As occurred in the water rite of Baptism, in this anointing rite we become clothed again with Christ. We become a new "Christos". This *new Christos* is not only imbued with Christ's Holy Spirit, His Godliness, prayer, and love and compassion but he/she receives by this grace a crystal clear identity, truly 'confirmed' and validated before the Eternal Heavenly Father.

INTO THE BODY OF CHRIST

From the waters of the font through and by the sealing with the Holy *Meron* the gift of Chrismation assures a genuine continuity between the entrance into and participation in the *Mystical Body of Christ - His Holy Church*. It is finally through the Eucharist that this membership is maintained. The sacramental anointing balances this *new life* acquired by the grace of Baptism and by the believer attiring and *putting on* the 'Christ Clothing' to ultimately become the fabric itself; a new *Christos*. The grace of Chrismation strengthens and *confirms*, one's life in the Holy Church, which moves toward an everlasting life into The Kingdom and it eternally remains the energy of that movement or 'spiritual progress' towards the Kingdom of God forever belonging to Christ.

It is noteworthy to mention that in accordance with the rite in the Armenian Orthodox tradition, this anointing is done always in the name of Jesus Christ; making a new *Christos* (anointed one). "Sweet ointment in the name of Jesus Christ is poured upon thee as a seal of the incorruptible heavenly gifts."

This chrism is perceived not just as a Divine *Energia* but the persona of the Holy Spirit of Christ Himself. The act of anointing clarifies one's identity and membership into the sacred fellowship of Christ. All who have been anointed form the new physical and mystical Body of Christ. The chrismated believer becomes

truly A Christian in the very essence, nature and spirit of the prototype The Christos, Jesus Himself. Identity then is not conceptual but substantive; not merely Christian but A Christian.

Everything which this Christian does hereafter is 'marked' with Christ and His Holy Spirit so that *he/she may be a temple and a dwelling of thy Godhead and may be able to walk in the ways of righteousness.*

Christ's residency is validated by the sealing with the Holy Meron. This seal is placed upon every part of the body that makes manifest His presence in us and through us—both individually and corporately in the Body of Christ. The sanctification of the human physical body through anointing is done so with the intention that the *Mystical Body*, The Holy Church is likewise marked, blessed and will be the final repository of grace. By the Faith of the believer and the Works borne and performed by that faith, ultimately the Church will become that which is poured upon it *a temple and dwelling of thy Godhead*. The believer through his/her works and deeds, wrought through the anointed senses of the body, i.e. the forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth, hands, heart, back and feet, will become a New Christos.

COMMUNION IN CHRIST

It is finally through the Sacrament of Chrismation that the Church is given life and breath. All who are anointed who have become members of the Church are enabled to enjoin one another now in sharing in the mystery of The Christ Jesus in His Body and His Blood at the Holy Eucharistic banquet.

Since the earliest tradition of the church until the present, this reserved privilege, sharing Christ in His Body and Blood, is predicated upon one's full membership into the Christian Community. Such an identity is ratified and validated in the Oriental Orthodox tradition through the Sacrament of Chrismation.

This practice is rooted in the Mosaic Law concerning (cf. regarding circumcision) membership. And now this same regard is transferred to the

Christian view of Table fellowship and Eucharistic sharing. Circumcision was a 'seal' of the covenant, and only those who were circumcised could partake of table fellowship.

This praxis became transferred and basic to the Church. Only those who were Chrismated and confirmed with the 'seal' of Jesus Christ were allowed to enter into Communion with Him at His Holy Eucharist.

BORN IN THE SPIRIT

Unless one is born of the water and the Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. (John 3: 3)

As the Sacrament of Baptism becomes one's spiritual birth as a child of God, the Sacrament of Chrismation is the *movement* of this new life toward God's Kingdom—a spiritual progress'. It is a life now conformable to the Son of God; a life of Theosis i.e. becoming Christ and

the three sacraments within the rite are essential to the wholeness and wholesomeness of the life of every believer.

participating in His Divine Nature in entering His Kingdom.

Through Chrismation, humankind is born in the Spirit and progresses toward perfection. Though the power of these gifts of the Spirit are not all visibly manifested at the very moment of the ceremony but later in the spiritual progress of the life of the "New Christos" it is certain that this powers' origin and cause is of the Divine Godhead Himself.

Thus Chrismation is the BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT of which Our Lord speaks. It is our personal Pentecost. Through this sealing, confirmation and anointing rite, the Holy Spirit opens up our physical senses and gives the newly baptized

the potential ability and energy to progress in the knowledge of the Triune God and to practice the virtues of faith, hope and a charity in the *light of the grace of the Holy Spirit.*

The tradition of the Orthodox, thus teaches the immediate need of Chrismation as essential grace to give that mystical breath, spirit and energy to the body born in the waters of Baptism. The body cannot move without the energy, guidance and grace of the Spirit which is the breath of God placed upon us through this holy anointing.

As the Father sent me, so I am sending you. And saying this he breathed on them and said, *Receive the Holy Spirit.* (John 20: 19-23)

Christ's Holy Spirit with which we are graced and clothed at Chrismation becomes His Breath upon and in us in the same way as He *breathed* upon the Apostles. His

Breath is now our breath, His Spirit now resides in us.

Both the water rite of Baptism and the anointing rite of Chrismation in the theology and tradition of the Oriental Orthodox Church are essential to one's salvation. Each sacramental grace having its unique salvific dynamic yet both dependent upon each other in preserving the continuity of *spiritual progress* toward perfection and life in God's Heavenly Kingdom.

While some non-Orthodox communions emphasize the Chrismation rite in terms of community membership alone, the Orthodox perception is more comprehensive

because of the union with the Baptismal rite. It is by this anointing one's salvation begins with the marking of the water and the sealing of the body.

In conclusion, Orthodox theology of the sacraments is rooted in the concept of *wholeness*. The sacraments which are each individual gifts of grace are likewise and even simultaneously components of *wholeness* of the soul and spirit.

When these sacramental graces are received, the believer moves closer in spiritual progress toward experiencing all the fullness of God. The sacraments, thus, are genuinely those gifts which show the plan of God as he designed it for all humanity.

The Oriental Orthodox rite of

Chrismation—the gift of Spiritual Baptism—assures us of the presence of God's grace which is Christ Jesus Himself. Our Saviour's spirit is poured upon us in order to heal, make whole, and totally unite us with Himself and bring us unto Salvation. Through this spiritual progress of every Christian, by the anointing with the Holy Meron, one's completeness is achieved as the sweetness of this Life and Breath of Christ binds us all to God and to each other. Christ is our common antecedent and common denominator; the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He is the road to salvation and it is by

and with His Holy Spirit we are able to move toward the Kingdom. As He said, "Unless one is born of the water and the Spirit, He cannot enter the Kingdom of God. (John 3:1-8)

Now the grand design of God's plan though appearing to be completed yet commences. The life of A Christian has just begun and will be completed in eternity, in the Heavenly Jerusalem, In Thy Kingdom Come.

Sources

Cabasilas, Nicholas, *The Life in Christ*, (New York: St. Vladimir's Press, 1974), p.101
Coniaris, Anthony M. *These Are The Sacra-*

ments. Minneapolis, Minnesota, Life Publishing Company, 1981.

Dix, Dom Gregory. *The Shape of The Liturgy*. London: Dacre Press Adam & Charles Blackwell, 1970.

Kochakian, Garabed. *The Sacraments: The Symbols of Our Faith*. New York: Saint Varan Press, 1983.

Kaloustian, Shnork. *Saints and Sacraments*. New York: Saint Vartan Press, 1969.

Nersoyan, Tiran. *The Order of Baptism According to the Rite of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church*. Evanston, Illinois: Saint Nersess Seminary Press, 1964.

Tawil, Joseph. *The Three Sacraments of Christian Initiation*. West Newton, Massachusetts, 1976.

TESTING THE MYTH continued from p. 8
the story, Oshagan, through the characters, explains the reason for ripping the priest apart. "To be naked was more for him (priest) than the others (congregation). The priest is a functionary, he has a status and a duty, he is a symbol, a paraphernalia, clothing, beard. When the symbol is lost, the function is lost also. I thought that the priest could still believe in what he is doing, even without his cloths, by virtue of his simple, strong, Armenian orientation." By stripping the priest, it was thought that his function and personality would be stripped also—that he would be deprived of his ministry. The story ends with the persuasion that the priest had a stronger character than the myth.

Still, the myth is very much alive among Armenians. The myth, that Oshagan writes of, is deeply rooted in the Armenian collective conscience and therefore not easily evident. As such, its false perception and interpretation may be devastating to the true mission of the Church.

It is this myth which allows association without proclamation of faith (even the instigators in Oshagan's chaos considered themselves as part of the myth). This myth keeps the church doors open despite the absence of a congregation—to be apostolic without the presence of the apostles. It gives the Church an opportunity to use the rhetoric of martyrdom to call for action, when in fact, the necessary discipline and commitment has not been cultivated among the communicants of the church. And the list of inconsistencies as a result of the myth, goes on.

THE ULTIMATE MYTH

Myth is powerful. Once understood, that power can be channelled in a desired direction. This is what makes myth effectual, but at the same time dangerous. Therefore, the Church is obligated to use the power of the myth responsibility (on the assumption that the myth(s) can be identified).

The challenge before the Armenian Church today is two fold. At first the Armenian Church must demythify the explanation that She has a national mission only. Jesus Christ, as the founder of the Church, did not sanction Her to preserve any ethnic or national aspiration. Second, once demythified, the Armenian Church must perpetuate the only message it can with any degree of integrity: the Christian Gospel. The Christian Gospel has the elements of birth, rebirth, suffering, victory, resurrection, creation and re-creation. The Gospel is not confined to the historical Jesus, but to the time-transcended God who reveals Himself from the time of Creation to the Second Coming. As such, the Church is the temporal upholder of this Truth. Hence, the story of St. Gregory the Illuminator becomes one of a lone apostle in his struggle to bring the Truth to a heathen people. St. Mesrob and St. Sahag are seen as true evangelists, who's dedication to the Gospel was so strong that they created an alphabet to speak to their people. St. Vartan's importance as a warrior for freedom of conscience is validated. Furthermore, the scores of other saints of the Church begin to gain their value within the newly-pronounced gospel.

The Divine Liturgy, as the main ritual of the Armenian Church, presents and represents the Christian message. This message is heralded and the life of Christ reactualized. The ultimate victory of resurrection is offered to all who participate. The Divine Liturgy is instructional. It allows for the intercession of the Saints providing a vital link with the past. The Holy Communion nourishes. Hence, the Christian Gospel has an opportunity to be revealed, to penetrate and to become part of the collective consciousness of the people.

The manner in which the Divine Liturgy is presented and offered to the faithful is crucial to the proper transmission of this message. Here, the need for reform of this vital ritual becomes evident. The Divine Liturgy has no intrinsic value in and of itself. It is yet another means, albeit a vital one, which bring Christ to the center of community life.

Comments? Opinions?



Write to
ACRAG
P.O. Box 700664
San Jose, CA 95170

e-mail 408-257-1846

FROM THE YOUTH TO THEIR CLERGY

1968

"WILLIAMS BAY MANIFESTO"

*Presented at the ACYOA General Assembly
September 2, 1968—Williams Bay, Wisconsin*

The world is in an age of revolution, a time of changing and becoming. The Church, if it is to be relevant to the world, must speak of God's will in terms of today. Christianity is not a religion for the timid, for it takes courage and strength of conviction to resist that which is comfortable, convenient and traditional in favor of God's will, which may at times be difficult. Christ continually calls His followers to renewal, reform, and revolution.

As the youth of the Armenian Church, we are disturbed by our Church's refusal to be a part of the twentieth century, to face the urgent and real problems of today, and to seek Christian solutions to them. Poverty, hunger, disease, wars, racial tensions, social discontent and turmoil sear the world around us, and yet our Church concerns itself mainly with erecting costly buildings and monuments and amassing material goods, rationalizing that it is necessary for self-preservation. We want our Church to see beyond its own interests, to share others' sufferings and problems.

At present, in the mind of many Armenians, the Armenian Church's primary function is to act as the defender of nationalism, to protect Armenians from assimilation. This is indicated by their fear of reform, for they worry that with change would come a certain loss of identity. On the contrary, we feel that specific reforms would bring increased dedication and enthusiasm, a renewal and rebirth of our Church.

Apathy and spiritual indifference pervade our Church life. Few Church members have that sincere relationship with God which is the basis of Christian living. We, as the youth, are not simply condemning the adults of our Church; we can see the same problems among ourselves. The ACYOA is suffering from an internal malaise; membership has fallen off, only socials and dances are well attended, spiritual growth has come to a complete standstill.

The time has come when we, the youth of the Armenian Church, can no longer in conscience allow ourselves to be used as instruments for the preservation of a Church which is living in the archaic past. We feel we must make known our discontent with the present antiquated and meaningless structures and institutions and our desire to ameliorate the stagnated condition of the Church which is ours. We are told so often that the Church belongs to us; therefore, we have not only the right but the duty to see that our Church relates to the present day, and thus, becomes meaningful to its members. We are committed to action... the watchword is revolution. Our revolutionary commitment and action addresses itself to a radical concern of making Christ live and grow in our Church and members. We are now resolved to speak out and act in accordance with the dictates of our conscience in all areas of life within and without our Church, wherever Christ is being crucified anew. ■

1992

"A CALL TO EXCELLENCE"

*presented at the Eastern Diocese of America Assembly
April 29, 1992—Boca Raton, Florida*

We recognize the tremendous demands already placed upon your time and energy, but hope you hear our pleas to recognize the centrality of Youth Ministry to the mission of our Church in the United States. Our commitment to the youth must transcend periodically from saying "the youth are the future of our Church" to leading us, clergy and youth, to join together and become a force for change. Together, we can transform the relationship between the Church and young people and truly make the Church the source for faith and inner strength that the Armenian youth and young adults of this country so badly need. We are not the future of the Church. We are a part of the present and should always be made to feel that we are a part of the Church. We should feel free to voice our concerns, without intimidation, and know, in our hearts, that we are being listened to and respected as well.

As an initial matter, many of the children take pride in serving on the altar, but feel they are inadequately trained. We feel that comprehensive and continual training of these youngsters will not only enable them to serve respectfully on the altar, but also instill within them at a very young age a sense of love for and belonging to the Armenian Church. This will, in turn, provide them with a foundation for service to their Church and community which they can then build upon as they grow through the years.

When we become of age, we should be invited to become voting members of the Church. As yet, we have no formal method of recruitment and policies re: dues-paid members vary from one parish to the next. We want to be involved but more importantly, we want you to want our involvement, to appreciate our presence, and to want to utilize our talents.

We also strongly feel that you should know the occupations of our young professionals and request their assistance; when the occasion arises. At present, when we are requested to "serve the church," we are too frequently asked to perform menial service (i.e. serving meals, selling raffle tickets, etc.). We are rarely given the ability to utilize our talents and creativity; yet, our generation is more educated than that of our parents. But we also don't want to be given "token leadership" (i.e. being placed in leadership roles wherein much of the work has already been accomplished by someone else). Show us that you are interested in us as people, not just parishioners.

Furthermore, as our spiritual fathers and shepherds of the flock, you must act as the most vigorous advocates for the youth in the parishes and especially before the parish councils. We have a tremendous desire to serve Christ and our Church. As our advocates, you must apply your great dedication to the task of ensuring that meaningful opportunities for service are available to us. Give us the chance to express our love and dedication, and you will never be disappointed. In particular, you can display your recognition of the importance of our presence and contribution by making sure that young people are nominated

and elected to our parish councils. Such an investment of love made by you today will surely lead to incalculable gains for our church tomorrow.

As college students away from home, many of us often feel cut off, as if a part of our family is lost. The college years are a critical and vulnerable time, when we form opinions and make decisions which will have great impact on our lives. The Church can provide an essential source of stability, strength, and confidence so necessary during these years. Our home parishes should remain in contact with us by sending us the parish newsletter and supplying us with a mailing list of students from the parish studying at other colleges. Maintaining such strong bond between student and Church will not only nourish us during our college years, but also signal to us the love our Church feels for us and the importance with which she regards us.

When we come home to visit for the winter and spring breaks, we would very much appreciate interacting with our parish communities. As an example, we would be very interested in participating in both formal and informal discussions with the clergy as well as the laity on a variety of issues, such as: our prospective careers, intellectual (not necessarily religious) topics moderated by academia and clergy; religious topics; and other topics which are not of a religious nature but which can be discussed from a religious perspective.

EDUCATION AND NURTURING

Education and information about the Armenian Church is immensely lacking, not only for those who marry into the Church but also for those who are born into it.

Sunday School teachers must be well educated concerning the teachings of the Armenian Church to better enable them to relay that knowledge accurately and clearly to the children they are teaching. All teachers should be required to attend not only annual workshops, but also supplemental programs and seminars to ensure that they are well trained and have sufficient knowledge of our Church's teachings. And the parishes should be required to assist financially, if necessary.

But it shouldn't end with Sunday School. We should have a continual means of educating our parishioners about what our Church is about, her teachings, her beliefs, how it differs from other Christian denominations, etc. And it should start with the very leaders of the parishes, the members of the Parish Councils. In many cases, they know absolutely nothing about the Church, their roles and responsibilities, but are nevertheless elected. They should be properly educated in this respect to serve as an example for us. Knowledge of Church etiquette, as one example, is inherently lacking. What kind of leadership does this present to us? Perhaps a comprehensive manual prepared by the Diocese or even a leadership seminar for Parish Council members would assist in this regard.

Attention should be given to non-Armenians marrying into the Church. There should be a program for all engaged couples wherein comparable Christian education is taught and comprehensive information on the rite of marriage in the Armenian Church is presented to them. At this same time, these couples should be given: an introduction to the Armenian Church; some background and history on the Armenian Church in general as well as on the local parish with which the couple will be involved; an explanation of the hierarchy and structure of the Armenian Church; information about the Armenian Culture with a synopsis of how it may or may not differ from other cultures; and some familiarity with the Diocesan by-laws.

There are also many individuals of Armenian descent who did not "grow up" in the Church and/or have at one time or another felt "unwanted" or "alienated." Many of these individuals may have had a bad experience or two while others may have little or no self-motivation. We must reach out to them. They too need our love and understanding and should never be neglected. In many cases, these individuals have been deleted from our mailing lists because they haven't come around, or because we don't feel they belong or have an interest in taking part. Who are we to judge as to who belongs and who doesn't? You never know when someone may be inspired by a single action or concern of another and hence decide to participate.

It is very important that we place a strong emphasis on educating and nurturing all of our people, whether they are of whole Armenian

descent, partial Armenian descent or not of Armenian descent. And we must rid our vocabulary of the word "odiar." In literal translation, the word means "foreigner" or "alien." It is hurtful and does not encourage the love we should have for one another as Christians. If we alienate these people, we are also alienating their respective spouses who were born into our Church—and we will eventually lose them and their children. It is very important that the clergy accept these individuals into the Church and appreciate their presence so that the congregation will also accept them. We must keep in mind that it is not necessarily having "ian" at the end of our names that makes us Armenian, but how we live our lives.

We should also place less of an emphasis on the task to be accomplished and more on the person accomplishing the task. We need to work together, learn together and learn from each other appreciating everyone's presence as well as what they have to offer.

FINANCES AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Although we recognize that our Church will forever operate under tight financial constraints, we must never allow this problem to impair our visions of and dreams for the future. At this critical time in our history, we can and must join together and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, develop an adequately ambitious and far-reaching plan to strengthen and enrich our Church and glorify Christ. Without a dream today, a glorious future is most certainly impossible.

We currently have no demographics for our community. We strongly urge our hierarchy to design a means for obtaining such and request that our clergy make it a priority to put together a data base of people beginning with birth to be subsequently centralized and updated through the Diocese with assistance from the parishes. This will help us determine the long-range needs of the Armenian-American community.

CHURCH SERVICES

Our church service is rich in tradition and very beautiful, but very difficult to follow and understand. We have several suggestions for your consideration and comments in this regard:

While the blue guidebooks in the church pews contain comprehensive information and explanations of our service, the information and explanations are not very well presented. Perhaps the Church could look into preparing another guidebook wherein the information presented is done so in a more organized manner. We also recommend that a course on the Divine Liturgy be developed to be taught on either a regional or parish level.

Many of us have benefited from the "Instructional Badaraks" that are occasionally held in several parishes. We strongly suggest that they be held more frequently than once or twice a year and that they be made mandatory.

We must also realize that with the increasing number of non-Armenians marrying into the Church and the fact that many of our young people have no knowledge of the Armenian language, our Church service is not enabling them to completely participate in the Liturgy. While few have learned the language and have grasped somewhat of an understanding of our Liturgy, many are unable to do so and cannot wholly participate. While we don't necessarily feel that the service should be performed entirely in English, we suggest that sincere consideration be given to periodically offering it in English, in addition to our traditional Armenian service, to accommodate these individuals.

Additionally, as many of us have difficulty understanding the service, the one thing we hope to walk away with is the message from the sermon. We feel the sermons can be more spiritual and relative to what we are struggling with in our daily lives. In many cases, sermons are reprimanding and focus on giving money. In other cases, while the subject is appropriate, the sermon is not well presented. We do realize that for many of our clergy English is not their primary language and thus, they have some difficulty in preparing and delivering sermons. Several suggestions include sharing sermons among the clergy, providing the opportunity for lay members to give sermons, or utilizing a question and answer format. We also feel that our clergy should be permitted to take courses in "communication" to assist them with preparing and delivering their sermons and the parishes should realize that by providing the opportunity for our clergy to do so will only be of greater benefit to them in the long run.

continued bottom of next page...

Compendium

- † The Diocese of the Armenian Church of America arranged with the US Department of Defense to airlift US military supplies, originally destined in Europe for use in Operation Desert Storm, to Armenia.
- † January 6, Theophany, for the first time was officially observed as a national and religious holiday by government decree in Armenia. Government offices were closed.
- † Bishop Mesrop Krikorian represented the Armenian Church and the Catholicos in the Synod of Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church convened in Rome. His Grace made a statement to the general assembly detailing the Armenian Church's position on topics such as the Christian renewal of the world, improvement of relations between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Churches, cooperation among Churches, international issues and the role of the Church, reforms in the Church, the disparity of the financial means between the Eastern Churches and the Roman Catholic Church and the resulting lack of proper clergy training. Bp. Grigorian, concluded his statement, by making an appeal to all present to mediate with their respective governments for Armenia's diplomatic recognition, citing the delicate situation and its similarity to 1915. (Source: ZIC News Digest)
- † Rev. Fr. Husik Lazarian, was elected chairman of the Executive Council of the Armenian National Movement. Fr. Lazarian succeeds Vano Siradeghian, an appointee of Armenia's Minister of the Interior.
- † His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of Cilicia received in Antelias, Cardinal John O'Connor, Archbishop of New York in January. His Eminence Cardinal O'Connor was in Beirut on a three-day visit with a delegation representing the Catholic Welfare Association for the Near East and the Pontifical Mission. The Catholicos and Cardinal discussed the current situation of Lebanon and the role of the Church and the people of America.
- † Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian, Prelate of the Eastern Prelacy of the Armenian Church of the United States and Canada, was appointed as a member of the new Faith and Order Plenary Commission of the World Council of Churches. The commission, formed in 1910, studies and finds resolutions to the questions which affect the unity of the Church.
- † Bishop Barkev Mardirosyan, Primate of the Artzakh, visited the United States during March 1992. In an unprecedented display of solidarity, over four million dollars was raised for Artzakh (Kharabagh) within the Western Diocese, under the direction of Archbishop Vatché Hovseplan.
- † A meeting of the world's Orthodox leaders was convened by Patriarch Bartholemew I, ("first among equals" of the Orthodox communion) in Istanbul Turkey. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Church's activity in a rapidly changing world, where the socialist system has disintegrated and religion is being resurrected in East European Countries. The meeting, held in March 1992, was the first of its kind in the history of the Orthodox Church. A key topic of the three day closed door meetings was the stepped up activities of the Catholic Church within the Former Soviet Union and East European Countries. The primates of the Orthodox communions issued a warning against the proselytizing activities of Protestant and Catholics.
- † A seven page statement issued by the primates of the Orthodox communions, strongly criticizes the Protestants and Catholics for proselytizing in these orthodox countries and suggests that these churches spend more efforts in "missions" to non-Christian countries, where the gospel is more desperately needed. Making a distinction between proselytizing and mission, the report notes that the current behavior of these non-Orthodox groups, "poisons the relations among Christians and destroys the road toward their unity." It was decided to suspend talks with the Vatican as regards to bridging main theological differences. Twelve of the 14 heads of Orthodox churches attended this meeting and the other two sent representatives.

CALL TO EXCELLENCE continued from previous page A PART OF THE UNIVERSE

We must realize that we are not living alone in this world. We are surrounded by people of all races and creeds. As much as we do for ourselves, we must also do for others. We need to understand the plight of the homeless and those afflicted with AIDS and other life-threatening diseases. And we must also realize that we, as Armenians, are not immune from these issues. Our people can be homeless, they can be afflicted with AIDS, and many do use drugs. We have to get rid of the notion that "things don't happen to us because we are special," because, in reality, they do.

We must not only be more compassionate concerning the needs of these individuals, but we must also be more available to them. We must focus on ways to assist the needy and those who are less privileged that we are and we need to be more generous in our giving toward them.

THE PHYSICAL EDIFICE

Our generation is faced with many varied interests and outside considerations as opposed to our parents' generation. Many of these activities/interests seem more attractive and easier to get involved with and thus, the Armenian Church is not in the forefront. To counter this, we feel our church facilities should be readily accessible and available to us for activities, which we can

schedule at our convenience. In many cases, the building is locked up and only certain individuals have access. Furthermore, there should be someone in charge of maintaining the church complexes so they are more readily accessible for those who serve. We need to deal more professionally with what our churches are here for.

OUR CLERGY

As the leaders of our Christian faith, we want to see you, our clergy, illustrate more love and respect for each other and we want to see you work together for the betterment of our Church. We often hear clergy gossiping about their fellow clergymen and feel that there is too much competition and not enough cooperation. We feel that respect and cooperation amongst the clergy is essential if the clergy, as the spiritual leaders of our flock, are to teach us by example.

We also want to hear more from you. We want to know why you chose to become priests and what your priesthood means to you. We want to hear about your own spiritual journey so that we may learn from your experiences.

We are no doubt aware that all of our clergy are overwhelmed and overburdened in ministering to our people. The issue is one in which all of us must work together to alleviate. But to help us understand you and your difficulties, you must communicate effectively with us so we can assist you in your efforts to minister to our church and our people.

Letters

Are All Brands the Same? We asked and you responded...

Dear Editors:

You consistently focus on timely, significant issues in the Church. It is interesting to learn more about the background of Armenian Protestantism and Catholicism.



With respect to their influence in Armenia today, I feel that their involvement is preferable to perpetuating ignorance and atheism. Since the Armenian Church is unable to adequately address the spiritual needs and interests of its people in Armenia—or in many other parts of the world (where it has not suffered persecution)—other groups that can accurately teach people about Christ should be welcomed.

And the Armenian Church agrees with these other Christians on all of the fundamentals or essentials of the faith. The effect of their involvement will be that Armenia will have a more informed Christian population and will develop networks with Christians in countries around the world. This will help nurture international interest in Armenia.

May God bless your work.
—Dean Shahinian, Alexandria, VA

Dear Editors:

It seems ironic that your last issue opens with a graph depicting the rise of Muslims and agnostics in the world while the remaining pages detail the differences among Christians. Could this be why Christianity is losing ground? I am disappointed.

—Martha Gulesserian, Detroit, MI

Dear Editors:

I thoroughly enjoyed your last issue. It provided very useful information. As a "son" of the Armenian Church for over 60 years, I have never heard the protestant story, the Catholic story and to tell you the truth, I've never been challenged to think about these groups. It is obvious that the spread of Protestantism and Catholicism must be addressed by our church leadership, even more obvious is that it can't be done by merely coming together for various activities. I found very interesting Fr. Movsesian's comments in "Re-thinking Armenian Protestantism"

that commemorations of Vartanantz and Martyrs Day "together" defies reason. His proposal makes good sense, but I fear it will go the route of Archbishop Nersoyan's work — "no follow ups to these consultations."

I am certain that I speak for many when I thank God for a publication such as *Window* which gives us an opportunity to think, question, and not take our religion for granted. Thanks again.

—Haig Omartian, Pico Rivera, CA

Dear Editors:

The Antiochian Orthodox model is precisely what the Armenian Church must follow if there is to be rapprochement. I thank Fr. Movsesian for focusing in on the AEOM work. I have been following their activities for a few years now. The action of Metropolitan Phillip is an act of a true representative of Christ. I am certain that God will crown their efforts and can only hope that our Armenian bishops would be so open. I would appreciate further comments and opinions about these "evangelical orthodox," in coming issues.

Thanks for a great publication.
Aram Donikian, New York, NY

Chrim -of- Independence?

Dear Editors:

I write to bring to your attention an apparent error in your last issue, Volume II Number 3. In that issue, you provide a translated transcript of an address, "ONE Free Nation; ONE Free Government; ONE Free National Church," which was delivered at Holy Etchmiadzin on the occasion of the Blessing of the Holy Chrim last September. You have clearly mis-identified this nationalistic but highly secular oration as coming from the lips of Vasken I, the catholicos of all Armenians, when in fact it is obviously not a sermon, but a political discourse by one of the public officials of the Republic.

You were obviously misled by the speaker's pseudo-Christian introduction, "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen..." and by the religious rhetoric of the opening two paragraphs with their reference to the descent at Etchmiadzin of "the Son of God, our Saviour Christ." But this is merely a clever rhetorical gimmick designed to appeal to the spiritual roots of the Armenian people. The perceptive reader recognizes immediately that this is not a spiritual message by the head

of the church—the name of the Lord is never again mentioned after the second paragraph—but some poor nouveau-democrat's pedestrian attempt to incite the patriotic fervor of his audience.

And "Chrim of Independence?" Really. How could the erudite editors of *Window* be so gullible? The Catholicos would consider it blasphemy to denigrate the holy chrim by referring to it in such obscenely secular terms. Credit for this cheap sound-bite should go to the savvy politician who used it as the focus of this political speech. It should not be used to defame the catholicos—as you have—by suggesting that he has nothing more inspiring to say on the occasion of the blessing of holy chrim.

Indeed, having so erred, it is now incumbent upon you to find and print the true transcript of His Holiness' sermon; the one in which he no doubt leaves aside the cheap patriotic rhetoric and boldly preaches the true themes of the holy chrim—the sanctifying, healing presence of the Holy Spirit of God; the transforming holiness which unites all the children of God who are baptized and anointed by it; the spiritual legacy of the great saints from Gregory onward who have been sealed with this very oil; the spirit of regeneration, resurrection and life which confront us when the old chrim is added to the new; and ultimately the glaring reality that when we touch the holy chrim, we mystically touch God.

The children of the Armenian Church are thirsty for the hope which God offers. We long to hear spiritual and life-giving words of holiness, faith and hope from our chief patriarch. We expect to hear from him the MEAT of our faith, not just the garnish. Anyone can speak about our "ONE Free Nation." But when the catholicos speaks, he speaks in the awesome name of our Lord.

There is a serious problem inherent in your transcript as it stands. I pray that it is a mere mis-identification on your part, and not an identity crisis on the part of the catholicos.

—M. Minassian, New York, NY

We have received many requests for the **Map of Religion**, which appeared as an inset to the last issue. The 11X17 map is available for \$5 each through ACRAG. (Make checks payable to SRP)



- ☛ Organizing a Conference?
- ☛ Moderating a Parish Discussion Group?
- ☛ Teaching Adult Bible Study?
- ☛ Sunday School?

Window can help you spark dialogue and debate. There is no substitute for thinking! Fan some fresh air on the fire!

Window can be sent in multiple copies at bulk rates for use in those special classes or workshops.

Write to ACRAG for current rates and details.



Electronic Window

Electronic versions of *Window* are available free of charge on the S*A*I*N* system. Past issues of *Window* are archived on this electronic bulletin board. S*A*I*N* is accessed with a computer and modem. Set software to 8-N-1 and dial 1.408.257.1846. SAIN is online 24 hours a day. E-mail regarding *Window* may be sent on internet to dervaz@gomidias.mi.org

Address all correspondence regarding *Window*, orders, change of address to:

ACRAG
P.O. Box 700664
San Jose, CA 95170-0664

window™

view of the Armenian Church

Send completed form and check (payable to SRP) to:
ACRAG, P.O. Box 700664, San Jose, CA 95170
One year (four issues):
USA - \$22; Canada - \$25; Other \$32

Subscribe today!

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Subscribe for a friend!

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Subscribe for your local parish!

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Back issue request:

Back issues of Window are available at \$5.50 per issue + \$3 s&h per order. See contents of previous issues on back cover.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vol. I, No. 1 - Out of Print | <input type="checkbox"/> Vol. II, No. 1 - Cults in Armenia |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vol. I, No. 2 - Liberation Theology | <input type="checkbox"/> Vol. II, No. 2 - Clergy Conference |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vol. I, No. 3 - Death of Church | <input type="checkbox"/> Vol. II, No. 3 - Brands of Religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vol. I, No. 4 - Clergy Issue | <input type="checkbox"/> Vol. II, No. 4 - Myth |

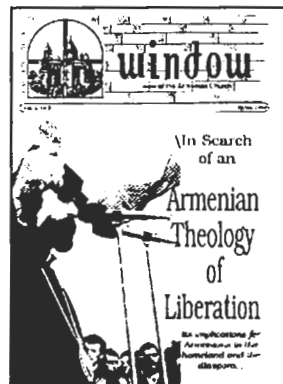
Make all checks payable to SRP.

Past Windows you may have missed...

Window Vol. I, No. 2 "ARMENIAN THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION"

ARTICLES: Address of His Holiness to the Armenian National Movement; Karabagh: The Islamic Factor; Armenia: A Historical Survey; Khirmitian Hayrig: The Paper Ladle; Liberation and Witness; Toward a Diaspora Theology

This issue provides a series of articles in search of an Armenian theology of Liberation, stimulating discussion and dialogue between Armenian church members and theologians. The issue provides a descriptive and interpretive study of the subject and underlines its application in the Armenian Church.



Window Vol. I, No. 3 "1915—THE YEAR THE CHURCH DIED"

ARTICLES: How Shall We Remember?; Teotig: Golgotha of the Armenian Clergy; Fallen Grains of Wheat; Data Analysis of Teotig; Canonization of the Victims; Church Treasurers: "Proven Profit Potential"

This entire issue is dedicated to the martyred clergy of the Armenian Church during the Genocide of 1915. With this issue, *Window* turns the views of its readers back 75 years and provides a glimpse of the pre-Genocide Armenian Church. For the first time in the English language, the monumental work of Teotig—a scribe who tediously recorded the lives of the martyrdom of the Armenian clergy—is presented with statistical and analytical charts. Addressed in this issue are the issue of remembrance, the problem of canonization of the victims and the silence of Church leadership concerning religious treasures.

Window Vol. I, No. 4 "IS THE COLLAR CHOKING THE PRIEST?"

ARTICLES: Beneath the Collar; Where does the Buck Stop?; Requirements and Qualifications for Priesthood; Chaos and the Need for Reform; Wounded in the Jungle; Priests don't Fall from Heaven;; Lost Meaning of Sainthood

This issue discusses the role for the Armenian priest from the perspective of both the Armenian community and the Church. In doing so, it dispels some of the stereotypes and myths associated with the Armenian clergy. Issues such as reform, recruitment, and contemporary challenges to the church are discussed in a very sincere and open forum.



Window Vol. II, No. 1 "CULTS IN ARMENIA"

ARTICLES: As for those Who Say...; What is a Cult? Coercive Cult Techniques; Sects in Armenian History;

Heretics denounced by the Armenian Church; Profiles of Cults in Armenia; biblical Doctrines; Interview with an Armenian Hare Krishna
In an attempt to educate the Armenian community on the dangers of cults, this issue provides an extensive coverage of cults presently operating in Armenia. The deep psychological wounds caused by the 1988 earthquake have facilitated the infiltration of various cults into Armenia under false pretenses. This issue of *Window* poses a challenge to the Armenian community and the Church, by the fact that "the cults will do what we neglect! They will extend where we cannot reach! They will be heard where our voice is silent."

Window Vol. II, No. 2 "INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF ARMENIAN CLERGY"

ARTICLES: Glasnost Without Perestroika; The International Conference of Armenian Clergy; "Let Us Spiritually Arm the Armenian Church"; The Current Religious Awakening in Armenia; Challenges of the Church in Armenia; Conference Details & Statistics; "Without Hesitation"; Mission in the Diaspora: Mary's Example.

The first ever International Conference of Armenian Clergy held in New York, June 17-21, 1991 is covered with exclusive interviews and analysis by the *Window* editors. An inside view of the conference is provided. Detailed information about the current situation in Armenia by the directors and leaders of the Center for the Propagation of Faith. Candid and alarming revelations regarding the religious awakening in Armenia and the Church's ability (or inability) to provide for the needs of the people. Must reading for anyone concerned with the current and future state of the Armenian Church in Armenia and the diaspora.

Window Vol. II, No. 3 "ARE ALL BRANDS THE SAME?"

ARTICLES: Church and State in Armenia: An interview with the Minister of Religious Affairs for the Republic of Armenia; The Armenian Catholics; The Armenian Protestants; Map of World Religions; Dialogue between the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches; Unity at What Cost; Florovsky's Model of Orthodox Ecclesiology; Address of Catholicos at the Blessing of Christm.

This issue of *Window* explores the Armenian Protestant and Roman Catholics churches, providing a history of their development and place within the Armenian Community. A candid discussion of possible means of rapprochement is provided. Also, the place of the Armenian Church within the world Church community is explored with statements by the Orthodox Churches and reflections concerning the cost of unity. This issue is filled with facts and information. A map of religions is provided as a centerpiece to this important volume.

